

# **UCLA**

## **Regeneración Tlacuilolli: UCLA Raza Studies Journal**

### **Title**

Miktlampa: Organic Trascription of the Self

### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/712289j9>

### **Journal**

Regeneración Tlacuilolli: UCLA Raza Studies Journal, 1(1)

### **ISSN**

2371-9575

### **Author**

Ley, Jo Anna Mixpe

### **Publication Date**

2014

### **Copyright Information**

Copyright 2014 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

# CUENTOS



# MIKTLAMPA:

## Organic Transcription of the Self

JO ANNA MIXPE LEY

### POEMA PARA ABUELITA: ESCÚCHAME

Camila went to her Quince in a vestido de fine filigrana  
croched from Abuelita's strands of white cabello.

Underneath seven layered vestidos,  
Abuelita hid the third creación from El Rey,  
the first two born tied  
around her body like fajas  
retreating into wind spilling pozole  
groaning pansas  
flee Las Brisas  
to Puebla  
Tijuana  
Boyle Heights  
cleaning solution X  
eating fine filigrana.

Pero mírame Abuela,  
puro purging por veintiún  
scalded mis tripas.  
A plato de pozole is like  
taking cleaning solution X shots.  
Qué pena, mi inútil cuerpo,  
good for only libros  
reading them, eating them, writing them.

Escúchame Abuela,  
I know you don't rest,  
I smell you as I wash my hands and mouth in el baño,  
I see you jumping off this page.

Las nubes-  
they are croched from Abuelita's strands of white cabellos.

PALABRAS PA' MI ABUELITA WHO CAME AS EIGHT-YEAR-OLD  
VALENTINA IN MY DREAM: IN LAK ESH

I wish I could tell you Abuelita,  
cara a cara,  
how you woke me up last night.  
You came through in waves  
past the cup living  
    underneath my bed  
    blocking entry way for spirits  
straight onto my chest.

I became you  
    as you became me  
an image lost in reflection-  
I saw you,  
occupying my seat  
in the kitchen table,  
stuffing napkins underneath  
your leg, thinking  
    no one was looking.

The moon broke in  
the kitchen, illuminating a blue corn  
growing from your hair.  
I walked up to you  
tore off the husk,  
and took a bite,  
    intractable hairs clinging  
    to the cracks in my teeth.

People say dreams are the manifestation of your thoughts, seen in rays of light through a kaleidoscope. Every rotation of the tube moves you into a new unknown location. But if you listen and use your mind to see what is before you, sometimes you can hear your ancestors. That is what happened last night when you showed me how tempestuous condensation embraced the kitchen, causing my tired tears to slip from my lips back into my eyes. I think Abuelita, you are trying to tell me I must have done a bad thing, again, because mi Nino announced their abrupt departure as if it were the next lotería card on the deck—"¡El Escape!" Mi Nina Licha marched to the washing machine and took out a pair of oars

and a fluorescent yellow rubber boat from her purse. They both boarded, sailing down an infinity pool forming outside our front door. As they sailed away, mi Nino yelled, “Hijole, goodbye, ya ‘stufas, we hate to say goodbye. Next stop: buy ten pounds of carne asada preparada before the carnicería closes.”

The indigenous woman, dangled in distress from the la Maravilla Meat’s calendar on the wall picked herself up whispering passively in my ear it was actually our familia’s turn to have the carne asada that weekend. Mi Mami pulled me towards her hurling pellets of, “¡Terminate tu comida! ¡No te puedes retirar de la mesa hasta que te la termines toda!” It was the chorus belched whenever I re-created los templos de Machupichu out of arroz con pollo. The chorus sifted between the bushes of white and green broccoli trees and templos built upon a foundation of paper dinner plates.

Abuelita, you fell asleep  
on the kitchen table, again.  
When I woke up to this “real life,”  
a San Marcos cobija held me tightly.  
A trail of baba  
ran down imprints  
creased into my cheek  
from the cracks on the table.  
Machupichu’s grains de arroz reflected  
off la laguna de baba  
forming on the table.

Pobrecita jefita. I know she still worries, as you worry Abuelita. Worried, Mami slams the door to speak into the sky. What she says is between her and the elements carrying them away between the heavens and the earth. But the thought of peeking behind the curtains and possibly finding mi Mami with her fingers tangled in her dark coarse curly hair, cursing God for such a difficult, unappreciative child, makes me think my Mami is the real La Llorona; and that is a person I never invoke. Whatever Mami did, it must have been a pragmatic conversación because she always returns to help me finish. With her cuchara, she grabs my plate and scoops Machupichu temples onto her plate as full-hipped hourglass figured Olga Brinski plays her violin in a scintillating sequin leotard on “Siempre en Domingo.”

## TRANSCRIPTION OF CONVERSACIÓN WITH ABUELITA ON PRAXIS

One of the perks that come with dying is visiting privileges. I've decided I'm definitely using my privileges to check up on mi familia, visit places and people I've always wanted to meet, dead and alive. But better yet, imagínate Abuelita, together we can be the Super Chicana Espíritu Freedom Fighters! Prevent unnecessary xenophobic propositions from passing. Jump into back door meetings, leaking their plans out for the world to see. Whispering truth into their ears as they dream and pulling their toes on our way out. Contributing to La Causa por vida y muerte. ¡Oh, que nice!

I know you are not omnipotent, let alone have enough time to be with me always, protegiéndome. But you came to me ayer, confronting me with the vilest of shadow beast. The relentless shadow beast clings from my insides, attempting to guide me by the greña backwards to starvation in a time when I am in my constructive process of healing.

Breath. I am in a constant state of emergencia lately. And I know you've noticed. Breath, breath deeply. I just hope you don't think I am selfish for taking this time to confront my own shadow beast that imposes its reality into my mind. Te lo digo because mi Nina Licha totally objects. She constantly questions many of my decisions, blaming college for pumping crazy ideas into my cabeza. "¿Quién te crees, thinking religion 'oppresses you as a woman' and still you act like a mujer indecente?" "Ay Nina, no te enojas, porque es la verdad. Well then you tell me why Ricardito told my friend the other day when he offered a calentar las tortillas, to sit down because 'los hombres no hacen eso'?" "Mira, you just go get your education and remember your place, hocicona." "¡Hocicona, ay pero gracias por el complemento Nina!" La Nina Licha takes comfort in the routine of tradition, even if it's at the expense of her autonomy.

Everything changes when you try to find meaning. That is why I'm taking inventory of myself. How can I explain this to you? It's like cleaning, elotes. Each elote represents the various parts of my identity as a muxer. When I am ready to eat one, like the one you offered me last night, I roll up my sleeves, grab the trash can, place it between my legs, and clean each elote, one at a time. I begin with the first hoja, examine its skin-smell it, feel it, and taste it. Cuando uno hace esto, patience challenges you like you wouldn't imagine—the feat of a disciplined warrior. Otherwise, you'll have to learn, the por pendejo way, when you find yourself running to the bathroom, bursting de chorro y vomito because you bit into a worm growing adentro.

The veins and scars in las ojas have much to say. Crispy deteriorating scars tell of times when lands suffer at the expense of a man made droughts, or if they aren't taken care by hands that appreciate the mil usos of an elote. Some of the hojas are good for later use, like cradling masa for tamales, or making monas. Once you are done picking through the kernels, past the cabellos, which when made into a luxurious tea becomes an elixir curing any piercing urinary tract infection, you can determine whether this corn is worth keeping—but you probably already know that.

Today I begin with the elote you offered me last night, full of gusanos pelosos, poderosos. My hands instinctively fold into a cup perfectly fitting the curvature of this elote. Cradled en mis palmas, I look at it, and strip it clean, or at least begin to do so. This is my documentation. Self-love towards my healed self-determined Xikana identity. Wow, now that's serious. In taking inventory of this elote, I can't really say I know its place of origin. Who planted this semilla, where did it grow, is it genetically modified, who watered it and why? I have absolutely no clue, so I think I will begin this investigation reflecting on something that happened when I was a nine year old chamáca.

As I crawl into the unknown,  
cover me.  
I'm going hunting for mystery,  
cover me.  
I'm going to prove the impossible really exists.  
Mami didn't need to get so mad at me that day.  
This is really dangerous,  
cover me.

Perhaps frustration justified her decision to point her right eyebrow at me. Si, it had to be why. Believe me, frustration would have deteriorated any sense of patience left in me, if I worked as hard as mi Mami did and had a daughter who did not eat. I always translated mi Mami's question, "What, is this not good enough for you?" to mean, "What am I not good enough for you?"

Discomfort gnaws,  
alerting my seven senses  
of the part  
that is going to smell  
acid.



Cloistered napkins seek refuge  
within trenches underneath  
my leg,  
full of food  
chewed  
but never intended to be eaten.

I knew I was in for it,  
when Mami asked me to get up.

Let it be known:

Mamis know EVERYTHING.

I tighten my leg muscles  
attempting to navigate  
the grooves in my corduroy pants  
to roll the napking pa' bajo,  
to the spot behind my left knee.  
But of course,  
napkins unlatch from my leg  
setting off small oscillations  
all over the apartment.

Sordid tremors follow. This time, the aftershock's epicenter emerges from my Mami's right foot, missing its target, my colita, casting my iron chair to frantically merry-go-round on its axes. Tumultuous 8.5/9 *the BIG ONE* waves shake through my body, painting the walls with red.

Fear of Mami's boomerang chancla and cinto, you know the one she has with her name and roses engraved into the leather, make me assume the earthquake drill position I practice twice a year at school. In friega, I zoom underneath the table to put my hands behind my neck, and find myself staring at my Mami's bloody foot. I jump back, hitting the top of my maceta on the table, as rivulets of sangre ooze through the rupture of her thick big toenail.

A trail of red soil guide the camino towards the space mi Mami retreats into. Again, I do not venture. I know better. I get up, run into the kitchen and back to my chair. I keep a close watch on the salt jumping from the pot of water I place on the stove. I don't want any drops to jump too far and create another unnecessary disaster. I turn off the water and sneak past the bathroom into the bedroom those stores, somewhere along its hidden places, a sheet of blue paper with crying clouds on the header. With a number two pencil, I write a poem in a new form I learned at school.

I am sorry mom  
I will try to eat my food  
And be better girl

Frustrated at the rules of the haiku because it doesn't allow me to insert an "a" after "be" in the last line of my single dangling stanza, I let it be. I gather all of my offerings take a deep breath, follow the trail of red and slip the blue paper underneath the door. After a few seconds, mi Mami opens the door, and weeps into my hair when she sees I have an empty plate and pot of salt water in my hands for her.

\*\*\*

Such a little thing led me to give life to one of my worst self-afflicting wounds. Now don't get it twisted, it isn't only about being thin. In fact it seems to be one of the only things Chicanas have in their favor. The romanticization of *la mujer* dictates we must aspire to be voluptuous sexy queens. Intoxicating men as we sway our sultry hips to the beat of a *danzon-swoon*, *swoon mi corazón*; yet never making any advances because only *putas* do that. Revel in the exotic nature of the fine Mexican cuisine. But this sole factor makes our *gente* believe eating disorders simply do not exist.

"How can you even think about being skinny eating all this greasy food? *Carkneetas*, *buretos*, come on, really? Choose your food wisely and watch how much you eat," was the nonsensical, classist advice from Kimberly Hamilton. *Pero como sabes*, when you come from a familia of four, where one fourth of the familia provides the income, you eat what you get. This is what caused the plate tectonics on the bottoms of my Mami's feet to shift little by little for quite some while. The day the plates fell apart, I learned I can no longer do that in the house anymore. I can't continue to hurt my Mami in that manner; yet I still didn't understand fully why.

## HARVESTING MAÍZ UNDER THE MOONLIGHT CON ABUELA

I gain weight and find myself unable to function. It's a hot as hell scorching kind of temperature by 9am *día* when a shower keeps you cool for five minutes, so this escalates this feeling so much more. And I sit looking at my schedule of appointments I have coming up next week, I can't help but get that uncomfortable feeling of how secretly I am not happy because I feel and know I have gained weight. I feel it in the extra lethargy of my stride and it's something my face can't hide. It might be

a pretty universal feeling for many people, but when you're aware of it, and try to acknowledge it yet not give it much importance and it still doesn't leave your awareness, it's a silent inner war. In times of war we always try to make peace. My offering to be proactive and as positive as is absolutely possible is what will save me.

I share this plática with you today, because I owe it to you and myself. You sent another tremor through my body last night and here I thought I was well over these tremors. The tremor created a mess, toppling over the cup of water underneath my bed Mami refills every time she visits. I ran to the bathroom en friega before it cleared the entryway para los malos espíritus. You smiled at me from the other side of the mirror and offered me a mona de hojas de elote. I leaned in to receive your gift and blushed in shame as an “¡ay chinga’o!” escaped my lips when I banged my knuckles against the mirror. I looked up and you greeted me with a crescent moon upon your face. You took a piedra from your pocket and rested it on top of the toilet on your side of the horizon. I shifted my weight to the balls of my feet, pivoting towards the toilet, and found a mona, dressed in a white polo shirt and blue skirt, leaning against a cup of warm salt water.

I woke up, making a mental note to look for that mona and sort through your new offering to see where it takes me. I close my eyes and first hear a voice, “¡Que no le cuenten, que no le digan! ¡Vengan a comer los más deliciosos tacos del universo! We got them all! Tripitas, sesos, lengua, chicharrón, de res, asada, al vapor, you name it, we got it!” We use to laugh at cousin Camila when she imitated the taqueros on Revolución who chopped tomatoes, cilantro, onions and carne so fast, we always wondered how they managed to still have all five fingers on their hands. Those were the days that no matter the location, carne asada was an every weekend family affair. Tías, tíos, primas, primos, the nieces and nephews, their carnales and novi@s would be damned if they missed carne asada Sunday—except for me. As a child, it was hard to avoid the entire event. So I ate in small quantities, always being forced to eat another plate so I could put some more meat on my bones. La Nina Licha was the culprit of my carne asada nightmares. Not only would she rub it in my face, she would compare me to my own younger sisters, “Que verguenza. Hasta tus hermanitas comen más que tú.” Mis hermanas didn't understand the origins of my “I'm not good enough” syndrome, especially when they scooped my food out of my plate and finished it in front of critica Nina Licha.

But when I started ninth grade, school became the scapegoat. If it wasn't a project then there was a paper to write. No one questioned

what I said because I was the first in my family to attend a college prep high school. So, I excused myself, retreating inside the apartment with my plate full of comida porque mi Mami always reminded me how it was energía para mi cerebro. The music and laughter coming from outside the apartment vibrated the bathroom window like a low rider car cruising down la Whittier Blvd in East Los. Sometimes you could hear mi Mami brag about me during the pauses for breaths the cassette player took between songs. I thought of her and apologized every time I slowly flushed the food down the toilet.

Little did Mami know I was to receive my Eating Disorder 101 crash course when I stayed over Kimberly Hamilton's house, "free of charge." Kimberly Hamilton always complained about how greasy my lunch burritos looked, as I hid the translucent nearly dissolving napkins clinging to the aluminum foil. She suggested I have a low fat, low calorie salad or turkey sandwich, like hers. Her housemaid entered the dining room with a plate of barbecue ribs and I gave her the evil eye when she tried to smile at me. I sadly couldn't be seen exchanging smiles with a "lazy and irresponsible" employee.

"Make it obvious, why don't you? Valentine, stop staring at her and make sure not to eat all the ribs. Can't you just feel the grease clogging up your pores?" she slyly whispered as she pointed to my T-Zone. But damn, I still remember those ribs being the most succulent meat I had tasted in mi fifteen years of vida. Just don't tell the fam-bam 'cause it's so over! We skipped dessert, and climbed the stairs. But before we crept into the room, her mother shouted she would stop by with a serving of milk and freshly baked cookies.

It was the first time I had stayed over anyone's house. You could fit Mami's and my room in her bedroom and still have room for a ping-pong table. Purple and yellow wallpaper clung onto the wall and she had a walk-in closet, which I confused for another bedroom. Kimberly demonstrated the no-fuss four-step process to a thin body in the bathroom to me. Lubricate, shove your index finger like so, down your throat, lubricate some more go for the final blow. "Ok Valentine, your turn." I'm not gonna lie, I had some issues doing it the first time. After shoving my index finger into my throat about five times, I was only able to get some of the world best ribs along with chunks of green beans and corn into the pink water in the toilet bowl. "It's ok, I couldn't do it right the first time either. We can practice again when mom comes by with the cookies." I clapped at my accomplishment anxiously and noticed the red teeth marks on my hand.

VALENTINE: Great Kimberly! How am I supposed to hide this from my mother?

“You so need to calm down Valentine! Here, take this!” That day, I also learned about accessories and how strawberry lotion was a great mil-usos product. It not only alleviates the discomfort of the smell but it keeps my right and left index fingers, Nice and Shiny, painted in a new coat of strawberry-pink, eliminating any sign of the previous coat of Teeth Mark-Red! My index fingers eventually replaced the napkin, calling me whenever I felt I consumed too much.

It was that day of the week again and this time I couldn't avoid it. How could I when we were celebrating your birthday Abuelita? And this time, the entire familia came, even some of your sisters who were in from Mexico that I'd never met before. Which makes this part of my reflection even much more difficult, but the truth is, I can no longer hide from the truth. And como dice la canción: “the truth hurts, because the truth is all there is.” I suppose I just became over confident by believing that a year of purging made me a pro. How immature. Every family member walked in with their specialty dish to the point that there was enough food to feed the vecindad. Yet the large amount of people made it possible for me to disappear until I got to Nina Licha who told me to grab a plate of food and join her and your sister. As I listened to stories of the amazing tamalera curandera you were, in my mind I was battling. I didn't want to leave but the longer I stayed, the more I had to eat. Y la Nina Licha noticed and she returned with more food, dessert and my sisters when I was done with my food. That was so evil, but she had no idea, no one did. And all I could do was fixate over all the food I was consuming and I missed all the stories your hermana told me. Que pena. When it was over, I excused myself, sifting through the crowd of primas, primos, significant others, fleeing into the bathroom with my small bottle of strawberry lotion. I knew it wasn't going to be easy; I ate a lot plus didn't have water with me to help along the way. But the thought of all the food was driving me insane. With a soar throat on my last purge, the door flung open and there you were in the mirror behind mi Mami, both staring at me with eyes heavy with fear.

★ ★ ★

## UNRELENTING CYCLES

Fast forward to  
present, I return  
to familiar  
smooth silver keys  
tap at my fingertips  
melodies emanate from my nails.  
Heartbreak Monday in full effect.

Again I revel in hesitation  
dissapointed words  
look the other way  
unwilling,  
unforgiving

me.  
I return to familiar.  
How long has it been  
since Smiths ridden candle lit nights  
saved this teenager's life?

The moon eloped with the sun  
for over twenty years  
and I return to familiar.  
Pen and paper, replace  
bi tapping fingertips  
emanating disappointed  
words  
on an electric page.

Is there any sense in feeling a lack of self worth for others?  
Is there any sense in feeling frustration in giving  
so much  
and yet it's never enough?  
Is there any sense in feeling shame in how my body has grown?  
Is there?

I look outward, trying to connect the dots.  
I look inward trying to make sense.  
I reach out to the Reflections  
I reach out to a simple word, a simple gesture, from the ones I love.  
I challenge myself to no longer be captive of my past, that last humiliat-  
ing purge  
But a manifestation of my struggle to be the wombyn I am meant to be.

Times of uncertainty can be deadly...  
...play hideous tricks on the brain.  
I dive head first, never look back.

I sit in front of my altar in my sala, mi Mami in the kitchen and ask for the ocean to take me deep into her womb. Swaddle me in a rebozo crotched de algae, show me schools of hope in deep caves. Instead all I see is red. A red-orange that makes your skin sizzle. A flight much like the one near the end of Space Odyssey where nothing is clearly discernable but the beauty of it all makes your eyes swell up with tears. I ask to be a radiating beam of divine light in the cosmos. But my head is encased in some sort of mask where all I can hear are the sound waves from distant galaxies crashing into me as I fly at a fast velocity upwards past an endless orange-red scintillating entity.

And as I take comfort in the sight, warmth, sensation of it all, I hear a voice, calling in a calm tone and eyes heavy with fear. Wish I knew at that moment what was happening. Comprehend the necessity for my body not only force an abrupt break but for it to go into a seizure; and realize the fragility of life. There was no time for that. Abuela, gracias for pulling me out de la greña onto the shore to a bright new blue moon. I open my eyes and find myself in the loving embrace de mi Mami on my livingroom floor. I burry my thirty nine year old face into her hair and promise her

I am sorry mom  
I will let go of my fears  
Be better wombyn

\*\*\*

I went to a carne asada this past weekend and was happy as hell to see the familia together again. Nina Licha was there, sporting her new jet-black hair due to hide those canas that actually give her sass. New

generations of crawling and running babies are chasing primas y primos all over the back yard. La beautiful cousin Camila con la girlfriend, who was still known by la familia as the “amiga”. Mi Nino hugs me with one arm and hands me a plate spilling with carne asada and warm tortillas with the other, “ándale está recién hecha pa’ ti mija.” His better half, did not stay too far behind. My Nina Licha gave me another plate con frijoles, arroz and grilled onions. Despite being slightly intimidated to have two platefulls in my hands, it’s good to be here, among tanta riqueza. What was I even thinking to deliberately ditch my family this way? Well I now have a lifetime to make up for it.

After eating as much as I could from los dos platos de comida, I finish talking to Camila’s “friend” and step inside the house to go to the bathroom. On my way, I peek outside the window and overhear Mami bragging about her “professional” daughter con master degrees during the pauses of breath taken between songs on the CD player. Some things just never change. Although I feel my fingers twitch at me, wink at me with convoluted promises, I remind myself of all the struggles you, Camila, mi Mami and Nina Licha have overcome so far and I ignore the urge to vomit my food.

Can it be that eating disorders are partially attributed to the horrible inferiority complex we have as Chicanas/os? The feeling of cultural, spiritual, emotional and physical displacement, internalizing feelings of self-hate. We no longer think and rather than choosing to live by our own standards we hide in those imposed on us by others. It’s sometimes so hard to avoid, we are the manifestation of learned behavior. But when we have so many aftershocks hindering our feet from reaching the ground and continuing to walk, we gotta hold onto something. This was my choice of survival. Wasn’t the best, I’m still haunted by its lure, but it’s what I decided to live with. Now I feel small tremors shake throughout my body, disintegrating the myofibrils within my muscles, each step making me pay for Valentine’s deeds but I am not a victim of her actions. I see my younger sisters and understand that in order for me to be of use for them I need to use my warrior spirit and help myself to help others. This is part of our indígena ways, this gift giving returns to us in full circles. We practice this during and after we live.

I have torn off all the husk and threads that cover the elote, throwing away what instigated the plate tectonics to shift. I’m going to save the uncontaminated kernels to prepare a delicious dish of calabacitas con elote. Abuelita, I will make sure to place these páginas de palabras with a plato de calabacitas on the altar, for when you return.



